**David Miranda Hardy Statement**

Hello, everybody.

Thank you so much for showing up today, for this WALKOUT of your routine activities—to build community and think together about the moment we're facing in Middlebury. We invited you here because we believe our college is heading down the wrong path.

About a month ago, Senior Leadership sent an email that shocked many of us. Even though they had been working closely with faculty governance on alternative paths to financial sustainability, they chose to act unilaterally. In their Apri 2nd message, they announced cuts to employee compensation—specifically, the reduction of retirement contributions for our most senior workers. This was a blatant breach of commitments the college had made to us.

Over 600 employees will be affected immediately. Sixty percent of them are staff. There are the people who have been the backbone of this institution for decades. These are workers who have endured cutbacks, layoffs, "workforce planning" and have kept this institution steady through many financial crises and a global pandemic. They are the keepers of our institutional memory and the ones who make our daily operations possible. But let me be clear: everyone will be affected.

A community that cannot trust its leadership to honor its promises is a broken one. And an institution that treats its commitments to workers like a piggy bank for a rainy day, undermines its own mission. Today it's retirement contributions—tomorrow it could be anything else they choose.

All of this is happening after a decade in which our endowment has grown by roughly 50%—twice the rate of inflation—and during a period of record fundraising. Tuition - students, you know this well - has also grown by about 50%. Meanwhile, our compensation has not kept pace. And once again, we are being asked to do more with less.

In that same April email, Senior Leadership also announced a plan to increase enrollment—without increasing faculty or staff. They claimed—and I quote—"The student experience will only be strengthened by these moves." But students, you are smart. You know that's not true.

Our working conditions *are* your learning conditions. When our working conditions deteriorate, so does the student experience. When our working conditions deteriorate, it becomes harder to recruit and retain talent. Our classes suffer. Our research and creative work suffer. Your learning—and the value of your degrees—suffer.

That's why we're here today: to urge our trustees and administrators to change course. If they want a strong teaching and research program to go with their endowment, they must strengthen the core mission of this college by investing in its workforce.

Because we are not just facing a campus crisis. We are living through a broader, national assault on higher education—driven by a federal administration that sees colleges and universities as obstacles to its authoritarian agenda.

If we are to weather that storm, we need leadership we can trust. Leadership that makes decisions guided by values, not expedience. This is not the way.

In a moment, you'll hear from faculty, staff, and students who will share different perspectives on how these cuts are affecting our entire community.

But before that, we want to acknowledge a hard truth: many staff members are afraid to speak up. The administration has hinted at mass layoffs as their only other option, creating a climate of fear. And yet, some still want their voices heard.

Caitlin Myers will now read a statement from one such staff member, who asked to remain anonymous

**Staff Statement 1**

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, and friends,

I stand before you today to address a matter that deeply impacts all of us at Middlebury College. A message was recently sent by Ian Baucom, the president of our institution, signaling support for proposed changes. While the message came across as supportive, it failed to acknowledge the pushback from staff and the broader implications of the direction we're being asked to take.

At its core, this situation is about more than just institutional changes—it's about the relationship between leadership and staff. It feels as though we, the staff, are being presented with a stark, binary choice: accept these changes or leave. This messaging,

quite frankly, is both demoralizing and dismissive. It fails to take into account the dedication and loyalty many of us have shown to this institution, despite the numerous shifts and challenges we've faced over the years.

What's even more troubling is that this approach ignores the role leadership has played in creating the very challenges we now face. For years, the administration has failed to address the structural deficit within the College, a situation that was clearly laid out in the economics department's evaluation. Yet, that report's findings have been neither addressed nor acknowledged. How can we move forward if we're not willing to confront the root causes of our struggles?

I've had the privilege of working at Middlebury for two decades. Over the years, I've witnessed firsthand how this institution attracted talented individuals—prospective students, faculty, and staff—who were eager to contribute to our community. But today, that picture has changed. Filling roles has become increasingly difficult. It seems as though the leadership overlooks one of the College's most valuable assets: institutional knowledge, long-term commitment, and the loyalty of those who have devoted years, even decades, to making this place what it is. That sends a troubling message to all of us: long-term commitment no longer holds the same value it once did.

I know that many of us have appreciated the leadership's efforts to advocate for staff and to raise these concerns internally. However, as we continue to navigate this situation, many of us are left with pressing questions: What comes next? Will there be concrete plans to build on the efforts of the petition? Is there a way for us to engage in a deeper, more meaningful dialogue with leadership, one that leads to a collaborative solution?

We all want what's best for Middlebury, but we need to be heard. We need more than just a binary choice of compliance or departure. We need a future where our dedication, our loyalty, and our years of service are recognized—not overlooked.

So, I ask you all today to continue to push for these conversations. To continue to raise your voices and advocate for the change we know is needed. Together, we can work toward a solution that honors both the past and the future of this institution.

Thank you

**Terry Simpkins Statement**

Good morning, and thank you for having me here, thank you to AAUP for organizing this event, and thank you all for being here in support of Middlebury College staff. I'll keep this brief.

My name is Terry Simpkins, and I've been a librarian at the College for 26 years come November. Twenty-six years is long enough to have seen many cycles of financial retrenchment at Middlebury. And every time it happens, two things never change.

First: The College's financial problems are not caused by staff. We don't decide what to pay ourselves. We don't determine our benefits. We don't decide how generous our retirement match should be. We don't create new academic programs that will require our extra support, or choose to build more buildings that facilities must maintain, or expand the Language Schools to the point where we cannot fit them all on one campus. College staff make none of these decisions.

Second: The solution is always the same.
Cut benefits. Introduce salary caps. Raise premiums. Freeze positions. Ask fewer people to do more work. Every time this College faces a financial crisis — whether it's due to external factors like the pandemic or the 2008 recession, or to bad decisions by the Board and Senior Leadership, past and present — *every* problem is solved on the backs of staff.

And every time, we are told: "Well, we have no choice! If we don't do it this way, we'll have to have layoffs, and you wouldn't want that now, would you?" It's like a mob boss walking into a store and saying, "Hey, nice little shop you've got here. Sure would be a shame if something happened to it." Let me be blunt: This is not a choice … it's a threat.

No, of course we don't want layoffs. But the idea that it's either cuts or layoffs is a false dichotomy. There are always other options, and a refusal to explore these is a failure of imagination on the part of Senior Leadership. These threats hold staff hostage to problems we did not create, and solutions we had no hand in devising. Decisions are made in secret, and presented to staff as a *fait accompli*. No input from us is sought, no adjustments considered, no delays entertained…

Why does it always happen this way? Why? I'll tell you why: because we have no say in the matter, no voice at the table. None, nada, zilch, zippo.

And it will continue this way — again and again -- until we find that voice. If we want to change this cycle, if we want to change the culture of how staff are treated here at

Middlebury College, we have, as I see it, one possible path.  We. Must. Organize.  The only way we will ever earn a seat at the table where decisions about *our* lives are made is if we join together — whatever the differences in our roles or our jobs across campus. The only way we can be guaranteed - the next time a crisis comes - to be part of the conversation, and to have an *actual* say in the solution, is by forming a union.

Until that happens, staff will *always* be the scapegoat for every financial problem and every failed decision at this College

Let's change that.

Thank you.

**Cynthia Gao Statement**

I want to speak from the perspective of a junior faculty member finishing my first year here.

It's not easy being a junior faculty member at Middlebury. The cost of living crisis affects us acutely, especially in terms of housing and childcare. Not enough faculty housing, very expensive, and being further reduced. In the fall, new faculty will only be eligible through their 4th year, not their 8th, meaning that for those starting on the tenure-track, they'll have to scramble to figure out housing on their sabbatical year, a time which is meant to be dedicated to research, and they'll have to weigh whether or not to purchase a (wildly overpriced) home before they know if they have tenure or not. This decision was made quietly and unilaterally, with no input or even notification of faculty, and when new junior faculty raised it with administration, we were told that we shouldn't worry about it, because it wouldn't affect us.

But again, I don't believe in benefits just for some, I believe in benefits for all.

Junior faculty are not directly affected by the retirement cuts - benefits operate on tiers, and faculty and staff hired after 2017 already have lower 401k match. I am here however to support my senior staff and faculty colleagues, because, I believe in the principle of solidarity and collective action. As my old union used to say, our working conditions are your learning conditions.

Moreover, if the administration can unilaterally impose its will on the most senior members of community, what does that say about its commitment to our most vulnerable? Unlike our peer institutions, we do not have a dedicated legal fund for international students. We do not have a proactive plan for working with students who

may need to stay in the country this summer, or for students who may need to finish their Middlebury education outside the US, or for faculty who may become stuck outside of the US due to visa delays and border denials. We do not have a clear commitment to academic fields which are under threat - Middle East Studies, Black Studies, Environmental Studies and my field, Gender and Sexuality Studies. We do not have a commitment to the underpaid, overworked staff who do not have the protections of longer-term contracts or tenure. Those who are most at risk and who have the most to lose not only are not being consulted or spoken with about the administrative policies that will shape their lives.

We know that the deficit has not been caused by faculty/staff compensation and benefits or underenrollment. It's a sleight of hand to claim that the school is out of money because it is being targeted by the federal government. We are far less exposed than major research universities. This administration is taking advantage of the political moment to push through austerity measures on the people who make higher education what it is, at a time in which it should be proactively defending our very mission. They are seizing on the fact that many people are afraid right now to speak out. But I'm not afraid. And if we band together, we all don't have to be afraid.

So from the perspective of a junior faculty member, this fight is not just about particular benefits. It is about an existential crisis in higher education - a greater crisis at than the Covid pandemic, the 2008 financial crisis, the Red Scare. (Because unfortunately it's all of these things at once.) What will the college be, if it no longer has students, staff, and faculty who are not US citizens? What will the college be, if it no longer has programs and departments which directly engage in political critique and the study of systems of oppression? What will the college be, if it can't support junior faculty who bring in new ideas and perspectives? What will the college be, if it no longer has staff to make things run?

We are here because we don't want that future: no students, no faculty, no staff, no learning, just real estate, just an investment portfolio. We will not comply, we will organize, because otherwise, there will be no college left.

**Freddi Mitchel and Josh Harkins statement.**

FREDDI (F): Hello everyone. I am Freddi Mitchell and I'm a student in the Class of 2025.

JOSH (J): And I am Josh Harkins, another member of the Class of 2025.

J: Thank you to David Miranda Hardy for reaching out to us to speak on these threats and for the chance to support our wonderful Middlebury faculty in this walkout. On April 17th, we published an op-ed in the Campus, outlining how the college Administration and Board of Trustees' proposed "way forward" will threaten the Middlebury student experience as we know it.

F: While the college Administration pretends to paint the proposed budget cuts announced in their April 2nd email as ones that "will only" strengthen the student experience, this assertion is a flat out lie.

J: First, increasing or maintaining high student enrollment will continue to negatively impact student-faculty relationships and put more pressure on college staff. It's as simple as this: a professor can't know 50 students as well as they know 10. As prospective students, we were pitched small class sizes, one-on-one advising, and a strong foundation in the liberal arts. As Seniors graduating in two weeks, we understand that the best part of the Middlebury experience is meaningful connections with faculty and genuine support networks. We hope the Board and Administration will realize that these cuts do not strengthen our experience, but only detract from it.

F: While we recognize the need to address budget challenges facing the college, it shows a breach of trust to break promises to students, staff, and faculty at Middlebury College in Vermont for the sake of carrying out what will likely be an unsuccessful four year plan to save the Middlebury Institute in Monterrey. As two seniors studying International Politics and Economics, we don't want to be pushed towards Masters programs at MIIS, knowing that it is all part of a grand plan to save an institution that was not profitable for Middlebury to begin with. We want to embrace the value of our education at Middlebury and support the thousands of students at this institution and the generations to come. Middlebury College is what makes Middlebury Middlebury and cuts to faculty and staff livelihoods will move Middlebury further away from living up to its mission.

J: So, let's focus on Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont. If the Administration and Board want to strengthen the student experience, then they should focus on the students of Middlebury College. Let us, as students concerned about our future and the futures of our classmates, work with faculty and staff to find a way beyond budget deficits. There is no College without students. And there are no students without teachers.

**Ethan Murphy Statement**

This is a classic bait and switch. I should not have to explain why this is wrong to balance a budget on the backs of employees. It isn'tthe Vermont Way and until now, it has never been the Middlebury Way. I'm here today to express my extreme dissatisfaction with the decision to abandon long held commitments to staff and faculty and I encourage you all to do the same. I'm calling on incoming President Ian Baucom, interim President Stephen Snyder, and all 17 members of the Senior Leadership Group to honor their commitments to Middlebury employees and to stop the benefit cuts.

I'm speaking for myself because this impacts me and my family directly and represents a significant loss of income. I'm also speaking for all Middlebury College employees because this decision sets a precedent, a "new" Middlebury Way if you will, where no benefits are safe and where the very idea of a "total compensation" package is meaningless.

The primary purpose of employer benefits is to attract and retain employees and to make them feel valued and committed to their employer. Middlebury's benefits attracted me to Middlebury College from Philadelphia in 2008 when the comprehensive fee was $49,210 and a season pass to the Snowbowl for a family of four was $350. Fast forward to 2025 and the comprehensive fee has increased by 84% and the same season pass by 213%. This is a small and somewhat trivial example of an overarching and unbalanced squeeze to benefits and compensation that has crescendoed to this current moment. If this too is considered tolerable, we can be sure that more cuts are on the way.

I love what I do, and I feel confident that I've held up my end of the bargain and have contributed significantly to the student experience at Middlebury. I work with students every day. I fulfill my responsibilities in my role as Audiovisual Technical Director, but I also teach courses on occasion, I help run a world-renowned video essay workshop every summer, I led and programmed the Hirschfield International Film Series for several years, and I helped lead one of the first conflict transformation projects with a team of students, staff, faculty, and alumni in Japan.

This again is my personal story, but I also know that my fellow staff and faculty members have also held up their end of the bargain in similar and often more extraordinary ways. It is safe to say that collectively, we are the student experience at Middlebury and we shouldn't be made to feel guilty about defending long-promised benefits or be made to believe that layoffs are the only alternative.

I'm saying no to cuts. I'm saying no to layoffs. I'm calling for a return to the Vermont Way, the Middlebury Way, the Right Way

**Peter Matthews Statement**

I am Peter Matthews, here on behalf of the group now known as the “Econ 12,” the twelve senior economists - the twelve brothers and sisters - who published a recent statement in the Campus.

We are here today to defend Middlebury because Middlebury needs defending, not just from the vulgarians now in power in Washington, but, agonizingly, from our own trustees and administrators.

When I first read “The Way Forward,” the email that announced the benefit cuts and enrollment targets, I felt betrayed. At a personal level, the College had first promised me these benefits when I was hired a long time ago, reiterated that promise at least once when I considered an outside offer, and in 2017 affirmed to all that keeping that promise – for incumbents, at least – was the “right thing to do.” These promises were important to me and my family, as they are to so many faculty and staff gathered here today. We made decisions under the assumption that the College would live up to its word.

(The benefits were more generous than some colleges and universities but – and beware the administration’s disingenuous claim that it is just addressing an imbalance – salaries were less so. Compensation, the sum of salary and benefits, was never more generous than our competitors.)

It seems, however, that administrators and trustees have a more flexible understanding of right and wrong than we do. It is not especially virtuous to honor a promise when it easy or convenient to do so and then renege on it when it isn’t. Instead, the College’s new understanding of right and wrong is one that allows it to break fundamental promises to faculty and staff to offset decades of endowment underperformance and aspirational but ill-considered projects here and abroad. And despite the College’s rhetoric, there were and still are alternatives other than mass layoffs.

But just how deep are these cuts? I have been asked. It’s just four percent, right? How much can that it be? Consider a staff member about to turn 45 who earns $50,000/year. Under modest assumptions about how much the retirement benefits compound over time, and how fast salaries will increase, they will start their retirement $100,000 to $150,000 poorer as a result. Indeed, a rough rule of thumb is that for those

standing here today who plan to work for another two decades, the loss is between two and three times annual salary, and perhaps more.

This is an incredible sacrifice - who else is expected, or even asked, to give two- or three-years' salary to support the College? - but this is what trustees and administrators plans to appropriate from staff and faculty who bear no responsibility for our current situation.

As I mused at a recent faculty meeting, it is as though the College has decided that, instead of a rocking chair for retirement, it will now do the economic equivalent of burning down your house. Worse, the new President's promise to start afresh once our financial house is in order was almost painful to read: it is as though, once our houses have been burned to the ground, he is open to discuss growing corn for Dining Services in the ashes that remain. He might be open, but I'm not.

More problematic, if the College breaks this basic promise, how will we trust it in the future, a future that, given the current political climate, will almost certainly demand real sacrifices? What value will a College commitment have in this brave new world? Who will ever accept trustees and administrators at their word? And how can it now pretend that we are members of some community bound by ties of trust and respect and honor? How, in this context, can it expect us to do all of the little things we do not because our contracts stipulate them, but because we see, or saw, ourselves as community members responsible for one another's well-being?

This is of course just the beginning. Health care benefits, housing benefits and tuition benefits, are all "on the table." Our emerging reduced benefits-high volume business model is one favored by fast food franchises and big box stores, not institutions of higher learning. And for someone who has spent almost three decades here, the change is heartbreaking. Join us, and let's defend Middlebury!

**Staff Statement 2**

The article written in the Campus summed up the feelings of many staff about taking a pay cut from the lost 4%, and also how demoralizing the announcement was. I do not think the trustees realize what a great deal they are getting from hiring local people from the surrounding communities and what they bring to the campus and students.

As an example. Any plumber, electrician or HVAC tech on campus took at least 15%-20% less in wage when they came here. There are about 12 men (there are no women, yet) who are on call to the college. Every night and weekend these men take care of emergency calls. Within that 12, there are about 6 who are real geniuses, they can tackle everything from gas leaks to water gushing out of pipes, to electrical problems, to HVAC issues. If one man encounters a problem that is not their specialty, they call their colleague who is. These men pick up phones at midnight, at 4am, when they are on vacation, when they are not on call themselves because they want to support their colleagues and the students. They do this for FREE!!! They do not leave each other in a pinch. I can give you so many examples of free work being done because they are awesome people. To be clear, the on call person is being paid, but the men he may call for extra information....they don't charge the college for a phone call but their help/knowledge can be vital to getting the problem under control. No subcontractor is going to give that kind of commitment. These men are the heart and soul of the trades on campus, and we trust them with student lives. None of these men make for wages what they could if they worked outside of the college, they are definitely here for the benefit package. The lost 4% hurts, especially when we are anticipating a rise in insurance costs this coming November.

Middlebury deserves great staff as well as great professors for the "student experience" to be all that it could be. These men are difficult to replace. I wish the trustees knew what gems they have in their trades folks.

**Laurie Essig statement**

As you've heard from many people today, It is a terrible thing when an employer changes the conditions of employment with no real negotiation with the employers. That is what has happened here. Total compensation is being cut for any employee- staff or faculty- who started before 2017. To make things worse, the number of staff is being cut and the number of students being increased. This will hurt education at Middlebury because more students means more work with less staff support.

But this is the local context and none of this is happening in a vacuum. We must discuss the political moment we are in.

We as a college are in a very precarious position. The Trump administration represents an existential threat to higher education. Whether it is by cynically using the charge of antisemitism ot attack, arrest, and even deport those who criticize the genocide in Gaza or attacking gender studies with the executive order on "protecting women from gender

ideology extremism" or Black and Ethnic studies with the executive order on "patriotic education", it is clear that the Trump movement means to control knowledge production in higher ed.

To face this moment, we need resources- We need resources to create a legal fund for those who are most threatened by the Trump administration- the members of our community who do not hold a US Passport or are trans or nonbinary. These groups are under threat. We need legal representation for our underdocumented students and colleagues. We need resources to sue when funding is taken away or certain departments are under threat. And we don't have that funding right now and that is not a result of the Trump administration but a self-imposed crisis that is the result of a LACK of fiduciary responsibility on the part of our senior leadership who for over 20 years have insisted on holding on the Monterey Institution of International Studies at a total cost of $300,000,000. And during all that time, the people who love this institution the most- the employees and the students- have questioned keeping Monterey. But we were ignored. And now the new president, Ian Baucom, has expressed support for keeping Monterey and for the compensation cuts and staff layoffs.

I'm not going to lie to you. We are in a moment when we could lose everything. We have senior leadership that refuses to listen and a far-right political movement that wants to destroy us. But some things are worth fighting for. Middlebury College is worth fighting for. We are worth fighting for. And so starting today we are here to fight for not just the future of Middlebury but for the future of higher ed itself.